DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 259 217 CE 041 959

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TITLE Role of Vocational Education in Transition Services for Handicapped Youth. Overview. ERIC Digest No. 47.
INSTITUTION ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, Columbus, Ohio.
SPONS AGENCY National Inst. of Education (ED), Washington, DC.
PUB DATE 85
CONTRACT 400-84-0004
NOTE 3p.
PUB TYPE Information Analyses - ERIC Information Analysis Products (071)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Articulation (Education); Cooperative Planning; Coordination; Delivery Systems; Demonstration Programs; *Disabilities; Educational Benefits; *Educational Cooperation; Education Work Relationship; Elementary Secondary Education; Federal Legislation; Linking Agents; Postsecondary Education; School Business Relationship; *School Role; *Special Education; *Transitional Programs; *Vocational Education

ABSTRACT

Vocational education, special education, and vocational rehabilitation are the three primary providers of school-to-work transition services to handicapped youth. Each of these three sectors has a vital role to play in the following aspects of transition services: identification, assessment, individualized program planning, program implementation and training activities, service delivery systems, employment services, and architectural barrier removal. By working to coordinate and avoid unnecessary duplications in their services, vocational and special educators and vocational rehabilitation practitioners can achieve substantial cost savings, reduce gaps in service, maintain continuity in services to clients, share state-of-the-art information and approaches, and develop joint political action campaigns. To improve coordination among the three primary providers of transitional services to disabled youth, practitioners and policymakers must work to resolve conflicting pieces of pertinent Federal legislation, address problems relating to duplication of services, obtain increased cooperation of business, and develop linkages on a one-to-one level. Various exemplary programs addressing current problems in coordinating transition services do exist and are described in the literature on transitional services for handicapped youth. (MN)

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OVERVIEW

ERIC DIGEST NO. 47

Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education

ROLE OF VOCATIONAL EDUCATION IN TRANSITION SERVICES FOR HANDICAPPED YOUTH

What Is Transition?

All students, whether handicapped or not, must make numerous adjustments or transitions. During the course of their schooling, they must learn to cope with differences in classes, grades, schools, and programs. Ultimately, they must move from the fairly sheltered environment of school into the more competitive world of work.

Goldstein (1982) points out that this school-to-work transition is particularly difficult for mildly handicapped individuals for three reasons: (1) recent technological advances have dramatically reduced the number of unskilled and semiskilled jobs that have typically been held in the past by mildly disabled individuals; (2) academic, behavioral, and social handicaps place disabled workers at a particular disadvantage during times of high unemployment; and (3) the "invisibility" (p. 2) of mild handicaps often causes employers to develop unrealistic expectations of mildly handicapped workers. Therefore, disabled students need special assistance to effect a successful transition from school to work.

How Can Transition Be Facilitated?

Corthell and Van Boskirk (1984) view the vocational development of students with disabilities in terms of a "service-outcome continuum" (pp. 27) throughout which students receive progressively less vocational support as they develop greater vocational independence. The primary providers of transition services are special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation; however, parents and the business sector can also function as key partners in cooperative transitional programming.

At a June 1984 conference on the school-to-work transition of disabled students (*A Report on the National Conference on Transition for Youth with Handicapping Conditions to Work*, 1984), a series of recommendations were proposed whereby transition services would begin at the elementary school level in the form of assessment and identification of students with handicapping conditions and career awareness activities and would continue beyond the secondary grades in the form of postsecondary-level programming or follow-up counseling after students had been placed in jobs.

What Is the Role of Vocational Education in Transition Services?

Corthell and Van Boskirk (1984) discuss specific transition-related services that vocational education can provide in the following categories.

- Identification
  - —Career awareness
  - —Referral to assessment
- Assessment
  - —Provision of prevocational exploration programming
  - —Identification of competencies needed for vocations
- Individualized Program Planning
  - —Development of Instructional Implementation Plans (IIPs) for secondary students
  - —Consultation with students and parents
  - —Participation in Individualized Education Program (IEP) and Individualized Written Rehabilitation Plan (IWRP) development
- Program Implementation and Training Activities
  - —Provision of regular, modified, or special vocational instruction
  - —Development of career and prevocational programs
  - —Curriculum development and modification
- Service Delivery System
  - —Provision of special support staff (aides, tutors, and paraprofessionals), special services (interpreters, notetakers, and reader services for the blind), and special student-loaned tools, devices, and equipment
  - —Participation in cooperative education programs (on-the-job training)
  - —Ongoing evaluation of services and student programs
  - —Participation in employer curriculum review committees
  - —Provision of vocational guidance and counseling
- Employment Services
  - —Design and implementation of work experience programs
  - —Delivery of job development, placement, and follow-up services
- Architectural Barrier Removal
  - —Modification of vocational school facilities to accommodate special needs students

What Are Some of the Benefits of Coordinating Services?

Corthell and Van Boskirk (1984) also list 29 services to be provided by special education and 23 that are the province of vocational rehabilitation. The relatively large numbers of complementary transition services available from special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation underscore the great potential for pooling limited resources and coordinating complementary services.

Ashby and Bensberg (1981) list the following reasons for development of cooperative agreements among the three disciplines that normally provide job training to handicapped youth: improvement of services to clients or students, legislative mandates requiring an agency to take advantage of services available through other sources before using its own resources, sharing of information and state-of-the-art approaches to services, cost sharing and savings, reduction of gaps in services, elimination of duplication, the need for maintaining continuity in services to clients, and the necessity of joint political action.

What Are Some Current Problems in Coordinating Services?

Despite the many benefits to be gained from coordinating transition services for handicapped youth, several major barriers to

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coordination still exist at the Federal, State, and local levels. The following section examines a few of the problems that have been identified and summarizes some of the recommendations that have been proposed to solve them.

- **Problems Relating to Federal Legislation.** Ashby and Bensberg (1981) suggest that certain legislative provisions—namely, the mandate of P.L. 94-142 to special education, the "similar benefits" provision of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 requiring that vocational rehabilitation make certain that needed services or resources are not available from other agencies before its own funds can be expended, and the stipulation in section 401.13 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Regulations that funds spent for rehabilitation services must be under the control or administration of the State vocational rehabilitation agency (as opposed to "third-party" funds)—have led many State vocational rehabilitation agencies to reduce their role in supporting high school vocational programs. To circumvent these difficulties, they call for identification of successful strategies for reassessing and altering collaborative agreements at the local level.
- **Problems Relating to Gaps in or Duplication of Services.** Participants in the 1984 conference on transition for youth with handicapping conditions (*A Report on the National Conference on Transition for Youth* 1984) devised a set of recommendations directed toward Federal, State, and local policymakers that call for collaborative planning to devise comprehensive, standardized career and vocational curricula to facilitate the school-to-work transition of disabled students. Included among the specific recommendations drafted at the conference were the following: (1) State offices of special education, vocational education, and vocational rehabilitation should develop uniform definitions and eligibility criteria and should establish policies to encourage joint development of standardized, statewide curricula that would provide a comprehensive, articulated program of training in transition skills beginning with career awareness programming at the elementary grades and continuing on through the postsecondary level and after job placement; (2) representatives from all three program areas should be jointly responsible for development of IEPs and IWRPs as well as for the design of needed syllabi and instructional materials; and (3) pre- and inservice training for practitioners in all three service areas should require training and competency in each of the other two respective program areas so as to enable practitioners to understand the capacities and limitations of the other sectors to provide transition services complementing their own.
- **Problems Related to Obtaining Increased Cooperation of Business.** As Goldstein (1982) points out, the cooperation of business is crucial to the success of transitional services for two reasons: business and its representatives on vocational advisory councils "provide a source of expertise to the schools regarding the world of work that students are being prepared to enter" (p. 37), and, as a provider of jobs to handicapped students, business represents the final link in the chain of school-to-work transition services.
- **Problems Related to Linkage at a One-to-One Level.** Like Goldstein, others writing about transition services underscore the importance of interpersonal skills in establishment and maintenance of collaborative planning and programming. For example, Corthell and Van Boskirk (1984) propose detailed guidelines for dealing with the issues of personal power and authority and establishing working teams, and the evaluators of Project Workability (*Project Workability Evaluation Report* 1983) recognize the importance of resolving "turf" issues and misunderstandings over individual limitations and priorities.

What Are Some Exemplary Transition Services Projects?

Programs incorporating the "continuum of services" outlined by Corthell and Van Boskirk (1984) and successfully addressing the problems examined in the preceding section do exist and have been described in the literature on transition services. Project Workability (1983) is one example of an integrated statewide transition service delivery system. Descriptions of the models for collaborative transition services currently in operation in Maryland, Michigan, and New York are also available (*A Report on the National Conference on Transition for Youth* 1984). In addition, Ashby and Bensberg (1981) have identified 10 exemplary models of interagency cooperation and coordination of transition services for disabled youth.

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This Overview is based on the following publications.

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This ERIC Digest was developed by Michele Naylor, ERIC Clearinghouse on Adult, Career, and Vocational Education, with funding from the National Institute of Education, U. S. Department of Education, under Contract No. NIE-C-400-84-0004. The opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the position or policies of NIE or the Department of Education.

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